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\* \* \*

## THE SIGN

*"What shall be the sign  
that the Lord shall heal me?"*

II KINGS 20:8

When she heard Hezekiah, king of Judah,  
granted fifteen years beyond his sickness,  
she asked God for five.

His was a kingdom of sand dunes  
stretched west of the Dead Sea,  
a falcon-headed land staring east,  
with Jerusalem its eye.  
To the north, fertile Israel had farms and wealth.  
To the west, rich caravans bumped south to Egypt,  
skirting rocky Judah  
whose only traders were the dry winds.

She has no kingdom to claim,  
but a flat house in the Yamhill Valley,  
which she cleans and sanctifies  
for her husband and children,  
and a borrowed field  
where she plants strawberries:  
durable white-hearted Bentons,  
and fragile red-blooded Hoods.

Hezekiah's treatment consisted  
of a paste of figs,  
prescribed by that ragged clairvoyant,  
Isaiah, confidant of angels,  
and laid upon his boils.

She lies down in a room alone,  
watched through glass by radiologists,  
while a cross clipped to her head  
buzzes red,  
sending to thirty white tumors  
a message  
beyond the reach of figs.

This was the sign the king sought:  
the shadow reverse directions  
and the very day  
climb back to morning.

But she disdains theatrics:  
she's always known  
the faithfulness of God  
in the natural bend of time.

So she goes about her hoeing  
as the shadow darkens sundial  
and beyond,  
a dark lid over the strawberries  
and the narrow stand of oaks along the river.

And she enjoins her family  
in her song of thanksgiving:  
*The living, the living shall praise Thee  
as we do this day.*

This brief, magnificent day.

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